

Jeremy Herb, Hot Dish Blog (*Star Tribune*)

Reps. Betty McCollum and Keith Ellison introduced a House resolution today calling for Rwanda to free jailed St. Paul attorney Peter Erlinder.

The resolution urges President Kagame and the Rwandan government to immediately release Erlinder and allow him to return to the U.S.

"This legislation is meant to send a signal to the Rwandan government that the immediate release of Professor Erlinder can prevent this unfortunate incident from escalating into an impasse in relations between our two countries," McCollum said in a statement. "My staff and I have made multiple attempts to reach the Rwandan ambassador with no response yet. Now I will be reaching out to my congressional colleagues to urge them to send a signal to Rwanda to immediately release Professor Erlinder."

In asking for Erlinder's release, the measure cites the country's constitution, which states Rwanda's rule of law is built on "tolerance and resolution of issues through dialogue." The resolution also notes the "increasing pattern of restrictions of free expression in Rwanda ahead of the August presidential elections."

Erlinder, the William Mitchell College of Law professor who was arrested May 28 in Rwanda and charged with denying the country's 1994 genocide, was denied bail at a Monday hearing. He has pleaded not guilty.

Last week, the U.S. State Department has called for his release on compassionate grounds, and Tuesday Sen. Amy Klobuchar sent a letter to the Rwandan ambassador asking for his appeal to be expedited.